Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

Annual Report 1985-86

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* *as of July 1, 1986*

Marcus Aaron II, President

Janet Simon, Ph.D., Executive Director

Annual Report 1985-86

Community is an interactive concept. It involves tradition and a sense of belonging. It also involves collaboration and reaching out. This annual report looks at some of the ways in which the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children is part of a larger community.

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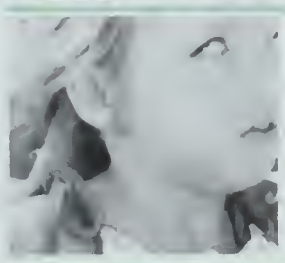

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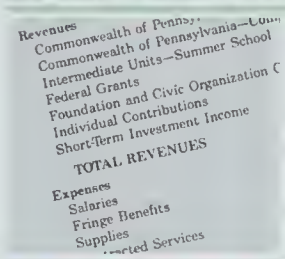

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The Year In Review

The 1985-86 school year, with its own share of accomplishments, can be viewed as a year of preparation for more momentous occurences. On one level, our staff worked hard to achieve the goals which we set for ourselves and our students. At another level, we all felt the excitement that comes from anticipating significant change.

What we are planning for the next few years is a series of events which are very different in nature and yet are closely tied together. First, we are looking forward to a building program which will reshape our institution. Also, our Centennial year—1987—will be a time for renewed growth.

In anticipation, the School distributed 13,000 copies of its strategic plan to foundations, corporations, school districts and parents in January. This plan, arrived at after almost ten years of self-examination, pledges a continuing commitment to the education of blind children regardless of the severity of their other handicaps. Primarily, it reaffirms the School's mission as an educational institution, being distinct from a medical or rehabilitation facility.

Because of our increasingly diverse population and particularly our growing population of multihandicapped students, it has become more and more clear that our present facilities are neither adequate nor versatile enough for our education programs. Therefore, the School has engaged in extensive planning.

Anticipating the building program has involved everyone connected with the School in a myriad of ways. Our directors have been active in the planning and background work which goes into such a major undertaking. Parents and staff have played leadership roles in organizing ideas regarding the campus and its use.

The year 1987 will mark the School's 100th year of operation and many special events are planned during the Centennial to celebrate the School's accomplishments and to remind the Pittsburgh community of our history. Judge Leonard Staisey, a 1940 alumnus of the School, has agreed to chair the Centennial committee, which will include 100 of this region's most noted political, corporate and philanthropic figures. Plans for the Centennial include monthly activities and celebrations which will focus attention on our achievements.

Taking an inside look at the School, several of our employees have assumed new responsibilities or have moved into newly created positions. Some of these positions are setting future directions for the School.

Among new appointments, Christine Kennedy, Ph.D., was named director of the Multihandicapped Program. Dr. Kennedy brought with her a broad range of experience with severely handicapped children. The Multihandicapped Program is the most rapidly expanding program at the School. Joan Clark, who left a position in state government to come to the School, moved into the newly created position of supervisor of educational services. Educational services include many of the non-instructional educational aspects of the School, such as inservice training and staff development. Clark also serves as educational liaison with the Pennsylvania Deaf-Blind Project.

With the promotion of Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D., to supervisor of research, the School has set the stage for growth in this area. Eventually, the School hopes to become a major research and training resource for professionals working with blind and multihandicapped children.

Our students' experiences were enriched this year by several events which took them beyond the boundaries of the School or which added gaiety to their lives on campus. One such event was the Beeper Easter Egg Hunt, an annual activity sponsored by the Telephone Pioneers of America. The forty students who participated hunted for the eggs by listening for the beeper noise. This year Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguiri came to the Easter Egg Hunt and the student who found the first egg was invited to the Mayor's office. During that visit, she sat at the Mayor's desk and was even able to make decisions for the city for five minutes.

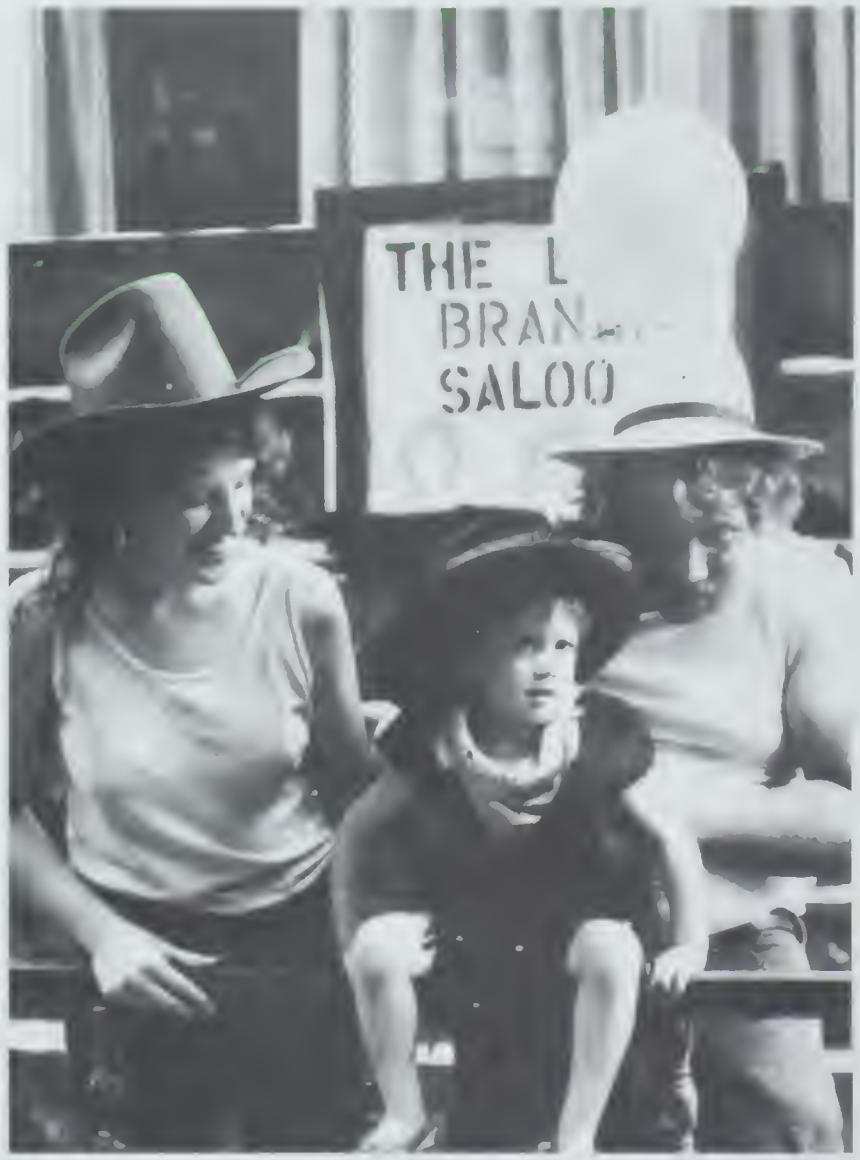
A campus rodeo in June brought students and their families together at the School. About 400 people joined the fun, which included an appearance by Sparkles the cow, a rodeo dog and various horses. The School chef put together a true western menu and the children ended the day by searching in haystacks for prizes.

One of our students, Kevin Diehl, age 15, walked away with the grand prize in a city-wide student art competition called "Paint A Pretty Pittsburgh." Kevin's painting, executed in pastels and pencil markings, showed the Main Building of our School. Kevin received a $100 prize and his painting was displayed first in the PPG Plaza and then in the window of Horne's department store. The contest was sponsored by KDKA, Equibank and Top Notch.

Community and philanthropic support for the School remains strong. In December we welcomed the return of the Lions Club of Pittsburgh's Christmas Tree Sale after an absence of three years. The Lions Club raised about $12,000 for the School through this sale. Other fundraising events included a coin auction which brought in more than $5,000. The Kiwanis Conference has been generous, also. They contributed $17,000, which paid for a preschool summer program.

The School notes with regret the death of Director Robert B. Willison and extends condolences to Mr. Willison's family.

Because of the groundwork which we have laid this year, we look forward to our second century with enthusiasm and confidence. Our traditions and spirit will provide the foundation for continuing innovation and achievement.



After School in the Community

Fun. Relaxation. Enjoyment. They are what we look forward to in our leisure time. Anticipation and enjoyment of leisure time activities is no different for students who live at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children during the school year. An especially important part of keeping leisure time fun and exciting at the School is the number of activities that take place off-campus in the Pittsburgh community.

A revitalized evening residential program was organized at the School in 1979 to provide structure to after school activities. Forty-four child care workers and two program coordinators plan and facilitate a range of activities during the afternoon and evening hours. According to Barbara Pacini, one program coordinator, it is only in the last few years that organizing off-campus activities has been a priority for after school. "Getting into the community is now more of a programming goal rather than just a nice idea. We realize that the students need to be in the community because it's fun and because they are part of that world out there." Not only are socialization and recreation important parts of the overall educational program at the School, but getting off-campus also educates the people in the community and helps normalize their response to handicapped children.

All visually impaired students travel off-campus at least once a week. Fewer multihandicapped children are able to participate in the community activities, but evening coordinator Sara Gildersleeve recognizes off-campus trips as important for any child who can manage them. The goal of the evening program is to play activities that can be enjoyed by children of different ages and abilities.

For four young girls in the Visually Impaired Program that meant participation in a Shadyside Girl Scout troop every Wednesday evening. According to group leader Donna Chestnut, very few changes were necessary to include visually impaired girls in her troop activities. "At first I didn't know how it would work out. But we all got something out of it. The sighted girls would help the blind girls with certain activities, and the blind girls would share their special skills, such as demonstrating a braille machine or showing us their Scout Handbook in braille." One student, Cindy Flehr, went camping with the troup for four days in Ligonier over the summer, a first for both Cindy and the troop.

Important and enjoyable activities for the visually impaired students are regular trips through Oakland and nearby areas. Shopping for personal products like shampoo or a pair of shoes can be turned into great excursions. Walks to the University of Pittsburgh campus allow for a variety of afternoon activities such as exploring the Nationality Rooms or riding an elevator to the top of the Cathedral of Learning. A few students might walk to rent a video for the evening or occasionally travel to a fast food restaurant for a hamburger.

Older students more capable of travelling independently are encouraged to go out on their own. Paul Campbell, a 20-year old student from Tyrone, ventured off campus two or three times each week last year. "I guess I just needed a break from my daily routine," he says. He would often walk to a record store, a bookstore or occasionally to an antique shop.

On a hot day, nothing is better than a milkshake. This milkshake is refreshing, but even better is the sense of accomplishment that comes from handling a complicated transaction on one's own.

Ten year old Mike Hoffman from St. Mary's also likes travelling in Pittsburgh. He especially likes bus trips in the city. "Riding buses is great. I sometimes get to ride sideways on PAT buses, which I like." Recent graduate Julie Pennington speaks for many students when she describes Pittsburgh as noisy, but she felt comfortable in the city even though it is much larger than her hometown in Elk County. "People were friendly and there was a lot to do. Now that I'm home I'm a little bored."

Off-campus opportunities are more limited for multihandicapped students, but providing as many activities as possible is still a priority. Walks around the block are encouraged. "The kids love to hear buses and trucks and horns and occasional jackhammers," comments coordinator Gildersleeve. A few of the multihandicapped students attended an outdoor concert at the Three Rivers Arts Festival. "It was great," says Gildersleeve. "They were just another group of adolescents enjoying a concert." Some students take advantage of the leisure activities for the handicapped at Reizenstein Middle School. These include music and movement, arts and crafts, swimming and fitness.

Ralph stops at the bank often to get change. The tellers know him now and feel more comfortable in dealing with handicapped people.

Some of the more handicapped students travelled to Kennywood last spring where the park staff patiently helped the group to have fun on the rides. Other popular activities were trips to Phipps Conservatory where students enjoyed the variety of sensory experiences, and a Christmas trip to a local shopping mall where small children visited with Santa. A community trip for the more handicapped children is often time consuming and tiring for students and child care workers, but all find it a rejuvenating break from the classroom.

These planned leisure activities are a continuation of the educational goals of the School, but the attitude is different. Every leisure activity must be designed with objectives in mind, such as teaching children to use money, but things like enjoyment, relaxation and enthusiasm are not forgotten. The most important goal of leisure activities is to have fun. The next priority is to give students the opportunity to make choices and to encourage the fullest amount of participation. The ultimate goals are initiation and independence so that students are prepared to enjoy themselves and pursue interests on their own after graduation.

Working towards these aims has brought the after school program out in the community more and more. Off-campus activities provide those memorable occasions that children cherish, and they encourage handicapped children to see themselves as normal. One such occasion for sports fan Mike Hoffman was a trip to a baseball game at Three Rivers Stadium. "It was a great game," recalls Mike. "The Pirates won. They beat the Chicago Bears."

Paul Campbell, returning to the School for his final year this fall, recalls fondly a trip to the Pittsburgh Ballet last year with a friend. He made the arrangements, including purchasing the tickets at Heinz Hall. "We saw a premiere of three new ballets. It was beautiful. It was my first ballet and I really enjoyed it." Paul also helped organize a group trip to a history lecture at Carnegie Lecture Hall. "I am an avid reader," says Paul, "and history is one of the things I like, along with mystery, horror and autobiographies."

One special opportunity that students from both the Visually Impaired and Multihandicapped Programs took advantage of last year was an abundance of apples at the Edgewood Country Club. Dolla Williams, general manager of the club, found herself with tremendously productive apple trees going to waste. She called a few places in search of some group which would want the apples and she tried the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children as a shot in the dark. The coordinators of the evening program saw it as a great activity, and more than twenty students of differing abilities picked apples for two evenings.

"We drove some of the kids in golf carts," recalls Dolla Williams. "The trees were low enough to pick from the ground and the apples were delicious. We all had a great time and I hope to have the children back again."

For Kevin Diehl, a 16-year old student from Bedford, the excursion was a first: "I had never picked apples before, and they were really good." The fun continued off the golf course when the students made different dishes with the apples they brought back to the School.

Similar activities were sponsored during the year by different groups in the community: a Carnegie-Mellon University dormitory invited students to trick-or-treat at Hallowe'en and a movie theater in Monroeville provided free passes to movies for some students.

A new focus in the after school program is to get students involved in planning their own leisure activities. "We encourage kids to pursue their interests and we help them as much as we can. But it is important for them to do some of the planning themselves," says Barb Pacini. "Socialization and recreation are powerful tools for helping kids adjust to the world. It is important that students have the skills they need to enjoy themselves."

That's why going out for a pizza or cheering at a baseball game or enjoying an amusement park are not only fun, they are education. And students at the School are learning that the community can be a wonderful, exciting classroom.

Training Specialists for the Region

While our students and staff gain enrichment from their contacts with the outside community, sometimes that community learns from us. The Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children serves as an important resource and training center for professionals in a host of fields.

We have become the experts in the care and education of blind and multihandicapped children and this expertise is eagerly sought after. Each year, students from institutions such as the University of Pittsburgh or the Community College of Allegheny County come here on student teaching assignments, internships and practicums. They come to hone their skills in education, medicine, social work, psychology, child development and other fields.

The Vision Program at the University of Pittsburgh has been associated with the School since 1963. Dr. Ralph Peabody, director of the Vision Program, is pleased that his students can get good training and supervision so readily. He says, "Students from this program now do two stints at the School, one in an academic room and one in orientation and mobility. It's the kind of practical experience that we can't adequately provide in a lecture situation."

The close association between the School and the Vision Program works both ways. Many staff members at the School are graduates of the Pitt program; now some of them return to Pitt to teach courses. Dr. Peabody enjoys making visits to the School because he sees so many of his former students. One of his former students is Dr. Janet Simon, the School's executive director.

The Vision Program is sometimes changed or affected by its

work with the School. Says Peabody, "The changing population of the School, with its larger numbers of multihandicapped children, has radically altered our curriculum."

But the association between the two institutions is mutually beneficial. Says Peabody, "We sometimes bring new materials to the attention of the teachers. We have contributed to the development of some technological advances, such as versa braille, and we train their teachers to use the technology.

"Sometimes our student interns provide an extra helping hand. Our students have volunteered for extra activities, such as taking the kids skiing."

One strength of the Vision Program is its proximity to the School for Blind Children. The Vision Program is fully funded by the United States Department of Education. Peabody says, "One of the reasons we have been so heavily funded is our relationship with the School. Most programs such as ours don't have a residential school in their front yards. And the beauty of it is that the School's openness and cooperation is unbelievable."

Another Pitt program which sends student teachers and prac-

Kurt Riedel, who has just completed Pitt's Special Education program, says, "I'm learning each child's particular ability. The thrust here is to encourage independence."

ticum students to the School is the Mentally and Physically Handicapped Program, Special Education Department. Many of the students come for short sessions to learn specific skills such as feeding and positioning the handicapped child. During the summer, several MPH student teachers gained experience in the classroom. We had the opportunity to observe two talented student teachers, Kurt Riedel and Elizabeth Meck, as they worked with children under the guidance of cooperating teachers.

Kurt Riedel, who was about to complete his graduate degree, spent four weeks this summer at the School. Kurt has an undergraduate degree in elementary education and has been teaching in the public schools while going to Pitt part-time. He enrolled in the MPH program because of his interest in working with emotionally disturbed children. This is his first experience with the severely handicapped.

Kurt's supervising teacher was Claudia Valverde. Says Kurt, "Everything is a learning experience here. The supervision is very good." Kurt's performance is also evaluated by the Pitt faculty who come to observe his work.

Another student teacher, Elizabeth Meck, is also in Pitt's Mentally and Physically Handicapped program. Elizabeth is a resource teacher for the learning disabled at St. James School, Wilkinsburg. She encounters handicapped students there who have been mainstreamed into the regular classroom. She says, "I wanted to find out how to help those children learn more effectively."

Elizabeth has been working in Leigh Strawbridge's room. Says Leigh, "Working with Elizabeth has been very easy because she has a natural sense of what to do with children, a natural ability. If a student teacher doesn't have that, it takes up a lot of my time and takes up a lot of the children's time."

Leigh has helped Elizabeth complete required work for Pitt. In doing so, she says, "I'm updating my skills and getting new information."

Missy likes music very much. By working with the xylophone, she strengthens her grasp and learns about cause and effect. She also enjoys the sounds she hears.

Justin goes outside to water the plants each day. He can feel that the little tomatoes are growing on the vine.

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

Bayard Street at Bellefield Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
15213-1499

Telephone
412-621-0100

September 28, 1986

Dear Friend:

Much of this annual report is dedicated to the concept of building for a brighter future with the assistance of the community. Volunteers, university students and many others actively assist the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children to offer creative opportunities for very special children. Through these efforts we are able to provide room for everyone—blind children who are able, those with several handicaps and those who need unusual assistance to meet the demands of everyday life.

The challenge of being able to help this diversified group of students is difficult. All activities are highly individualized and unique to meet the needs of every child.

Being able to structure responsive, comprehensive programs is expensive. While the School receives state funding, additional costs, beyond reimbursement, are readily apparent. Private support enables the School to offer special infant training programs, conduct valuable research projects and modernize its plant. Community help has enabled us to enrich the School for nearly one hundred years. Your generosity is as important today as it was in the past. The gifts of friends and supporters allow this School to create viable and compassionate alternatives for children who require extraordinary support.

Your personal response to this appeal will help to ensure quality services for visually handicapped children. A return envelope is enclosed for your convenience. If you choose, the School can be named as a recipient of your United Way donation through the Donor Option Plan.

Please help us to meet the interests and needs of these deserving children.

Sincerely,

Marcus Aaron II
President

Janet Simon, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Janet Simon, Ph D
Executive Director

Officers

Marcus Aaron II, President
J Mebon Childs, Vice President
George N Woodside, Secretary
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Mrs Gretchen V Schoonmaker
Arthur M Scully Jr
Hon Leonard C Staisey
Charles P Stewart, Jr
Mrs C Zook Sutton
James M Walton
Mrs William K Whiteford Sr

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

The founders of our School had a philosophy which is as pertinent today as it was in the 19th century. They wanted a School which was both a haven for blind students and a preparation for independent life. We still teach independence here. If you would like to help us start our students on the road to self-sufficiency, send your contribution to the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

City State Zip

Make checks payable to ***Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children***.

Place
Stamp
Here

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children
Bayard Street at Bellefield Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1499

Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children

Operating Funds for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1986

Revenues	
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—Appropriation	$ 5,132,800
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—Compensatory Programs	208,900
Intermediate Units—Summer School	122,000
Federal Grants	283,100
Foundation and Civic Organization Gifts	111,600
Individual Contributions	207,100
Short-Term Investment Income	185,500
TOTAL REVENUES	$ 6,251,000
Expenses	
Salaries	$ 4,046,800
Fringe Benefits	1,136,600
Supplies	239,100
Contracted Services	278,200
Depreciation	490,700
Other Expenses	672,600
TOTAL EXPENSES	$ 6,864,000
Excess of Expenses over Revenues	($ 613,000)

The Financial Statements of the School are subject to audit by the independent certified public accountants, KMG Main Hurdman.

The Operating Funds Statement shown above reflects the current results of the School Operating, Projects, and Specific Purpose Funds.

Three federal projects are funded through the National Institute of Handicapped Research, Handicapped Children's Early Education Fund and Special Education Program, U.S. Office of Education. Also, materials under quota allocation from the American Printing House for the Blind are included.

Research: Our Strength is Growing

Research on a very human level. That is an apt description of the efforts going on right now at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children to make life better for its students and their families. That same research can have a similar impact on handicapped populations throughout the nation.

While the School has always had an interest in shedding light on the behaviors and problems of its students, research efforts today are more systematic, more focused and more in tune with other professional findings.

In large part, this emphasis on detailed information gathering has been a team effort which has involved people at all levels. Any list of people who have helped with School based research would have to include the educational management staff, social workers, child development specialists, teachers, parents, volunteers and, of course, our students.

Any protracted or in depth research effort requires funding, and in recent years the School has been fortunate in attracting funds from a variety of public and private sources. Some of the federal sources include the National Institute of Handicapped Research and many of the specialized granting agencies of the United States Department of Education. Philanthropic groups such as the Buhl Foundation, The Pittsburgh Foundation and the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation have also funded research efforts at the School.

The work of building an ongoing research component into the everyday workings of the School was initiated in 1981 by Janet Simon, Ph.D., and has been spearheaded by Vincent B. Van Hasselt, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist. During the past year, Van Hasselt was named research supervisor, a position which indicates the School's ongoing commitment to serious research.

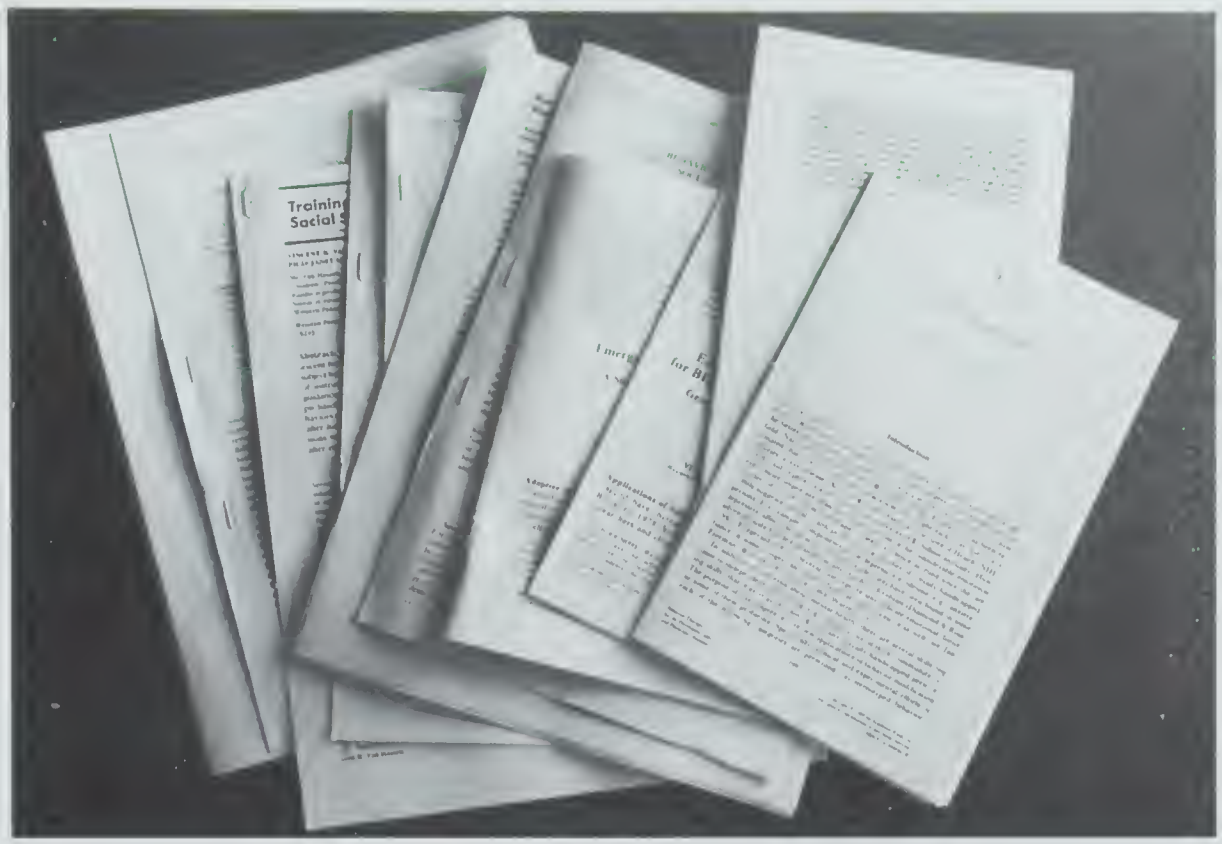
One of Van Hasselt's strengths is his ability to collaborate, not only with others at the School, but with researchers at other institutions, most notably Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (WPIC). Those collaborations have given depth to the work.

Van Hasselt says, "We are not just gathering knowledge for its own sake. All of our work is psycho-educational in nature and it all involves some interventions. It is geared towards direct clinical applications."

A look at the more than 50 publications authored by the research team strengthens the notion that this research is ultimately intended to have practical applications. One publication, called "Assessment of Social Skills in Visually Handicapped Adolescents" documents that some visually impaired teenagers lack good verbal communications, while another publication, a treatment manual called "Social Skills Training for Visually Handicapped Children," suggests methods for enhancing interpersonal effectiveness.

Van Hasselt believes that research ideally should have this level of practicality. He says, "We try to identify important areas of need encountered by the children we serve. We attempt to further understand their problems and to implement interventions which will help them and their families."

Currently there are three major research efforts either underway at the School or about to conclude. Two of them explore the all-important issues of family dynamics when a handicapped child is involved, while the third is a project designed to bring some measure of independence to multihandicapped children. Van Hasselt considers all three to be pilot projects which can be duplicated at other institutions.



A four year project, called "Assessment and Treatment of Families of Visually Handicapped Children," looks at what happens between handicapped children and their families. The children involved in this study were mostly between the ages of 10 and 17.

During the initial assessment phase of the project, the research team evaluated the difficulties that families might be encountering and the skill development of the handicapped children.

The second phase of the project focussed on family treatment. The researchers tried to isolate problems and issues that were unique to these families.

This project was a collaborative effort between the School and Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, with Dr. Michel Hersen leading the efforts at WPIC. It was funded by the National Institute of Handicapped Research.

The Parent and Toddler Training Program (PATT) is an attempt to help a similar population. This is an early intervention program for blind and multihandicapped infants and their families. Its goal is to influence the social and emotional development of these infants who might otherwise experience trouble with social adjustments later in life.

This project, now in its third and final year, addresses a number of crucial family issues, such as family reactions to the birth of a handicapped child, marital communications and care giving skills. The PATT Team, which consists of a social worker and child development specialists, makes an effort to bolster the supportiveness of both parents towards each other when they are facing a problem with their child.

Says Van Hasselt, "The birth of a handicapped infant can cause a lot of stress on family life. We want to increase the long term adjustment of children and families through an emphasis on parent training."

To do this, the families were involved in an extensive assessment process to ascertain the nature of the family's interaction and its level of adjustment to their handicapped child. On the basis of these assessments, a standardized curriculum was created to enable PATT workers to guide families most effectively. The PATT project has been integrated into the School's early education program and will continue even after the grant money is ended. It has been funded by the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program, U.S. Office of Education.

While these two projects are nearing completion, at least as pilot efforts, a third project, entitled "Behavior Management and Vocational Skills Training for Deaf/Blind Severely Handicapped Children and Youth" is in its early stages. This project is a collaboration between the School, WPIC and the Pittsburgh Blind Association. It addresses the needs of more severely handicapped children and its aim is "to teach these children skills that will enable them to function as independently as possible in the least restrictive environment."

The research team will be working with a group of multihandicapped children in a three-phased approach. During the first phase, behavioral techniques are employed to eliminate some of the maladaptive behavior patterns that are common with these children, such as hostility or self-abuse. This phase is largely ended and, Van Hasselt says, "The preliminary findings are that we are getting good results. These children are responding well to the behavioral training."

The next step will be to teach some simple vocational skills to these students so that they may eventually work in sheltered workshops. During the final phase, the Pittsburgh Blind Association will be setting up actual workshop conditions and evaluating the effectiveness of children in this environment. This project is funded by the Special Education Program, United States Office of Education.

As analyses of these projects are completed, the School is eager to make their findings public. Recently, team member Barbara Kline discussed their work on the PATT Project at a convention of the Association for Children's Health. Van Hasselt has also recently presented papers at meetings of the American Psychological Association and the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy.

Just as the current research projects grew out of a need for more knowledge about our students and their families, the School continues to be committed to conducting future projects that have significance to blind children. Research is a collateral interest of the School. Executive Director, Janet Simon believes that "by engaging in purposeful, well defined study, the field of special education will mature. Our School can play an active role in an exciting movement."

Bequests

The following list includes the names of those people who, over the years, have made bequests from their estates to the School. This is a cumulative list of deferred gifts. It does not include annual contributors or donors of memorial gifts.

Louis I. Aaron
Anna Elizabeth Abbott
William M. Achhammer
Louis Adamovitch
Abraham Adelman
Irma N. Agnew
Virginia Aiken
Charles M. Alexander
Grace R. Alster
Charlotte M. Anderson
Rose C. McHugh Anderson
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1985-86 Annual Report

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and staff of the
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